

ANCS Provides Access to Alaska Museum Collections

The Alaska Field Area is home to 16 NPS units, including the largest national park in the nation, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Many units are young, having been established in 1980, so there remains much to be done in the way of research and resource documentation. Curatorial Services in the region plays a vital role in terms of cataloging and storage of specimens collected for myriad resource management projects. The Automated National Catalog System (ANCS) facilitates documentation, data retrieval, and storage information for specimens of a given project while centralized storage provides a safe, secure repository for natural and cultural resource specimens.

Important as the curator's role may be, few parks have been able to establish permanent or even temporary curatorial positions. This makes it more difficult to document collections, as well as making our role and services less visible to park staff and researchers. In order to boost visibility, the Alaska Regional Curator diligently promoted the use of collections and ANCS databases as tools for research and project planning. Staff are often surprised to learn what types of specimens have been cataloged, the numbers of items, and where they are stored. Through this "mini campaign," Jean Rodeck (Swearingen) and her staff brought the value and breadth of Alaskan park collections to the attention of NPS employees and outside researchers.

For a recent meeting of Alaska national park resource managers, regional curatorial staff compiled packets of natural history information specif-

ically for each park unit. Each packet included a "unique" listing of specimens represented in the collections, lists of outside repositories, and synopses of currently identified, uncataloged specimens resulting from collecting under permit.

Other examples of ANCS data compilation and information sharing from the region include in-house publications such as *Flora of Alaska National Parks*, *Checklist of Animalia Specimens in Collections of National Park Units in Alaska*, and contributions to Dr. Vincent Santucci's national park paleontological documentation publication. It is hoped that updated versions of the flora and fauna checklists can be produced in fiscal year 1995 or 1996. Staff limitations have prevented such a project thus far, but new computer software may greatly facilitate the process.

Some advances have been made in the area of standardization of data entry for natural history specimens in the region. Seven years ago, museum technician and botanist Dr. Garry Davies developed a standardized entry format for vascular plants and moss/lichens, as well as a 23-page guide to specimen preparation and documentation entitled "Herbarium Hints." In 1993, this was revised and expanded to address all biological, geological, and paleontological specimens. Titled "Natural History Collections Documentation Guidebook," the spiral bound packet is provided to researchers who plan to collect under permit in order to inform them of their documentation responsibilities.

It has been gratifying to receive positive feedback from park resource staff regarding museum specimens and to have them recognize the value of collections in terms of resource documentation. We have found that it is critical for curatorial staff to develop a dialog with other branches and divisions as a means to share information. Once established, these connections prove invaluable for all involved.

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Increasing Visibility and Access

The Museum Management Program Council is exploring ways to make use of National Park Service natural and cultural museum collections. A committee has been formed to identify innovative ways of using our collections, not only for our own research and to educate the public, but to provoke further interest in NPS collections in general. The committee's task is to develop and distribute a strategy for such uses as publications, and other methods to assure that NPS collections are more accessible and visible to researchers and to the general public.

If you have any new ideas on how to use our collections, send them to Pam West on cc:Mail, pam_west@NPS.gov on the Internet, or to National Capital Field Area, 1100 Ohio Drive, SW, Room 134, Washington, DC 20242.